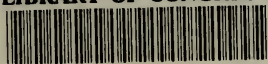


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LOST LETTERS FROM
LESBOS

*"All that Earth
Produced to Earth returns; Whate'er derives
From an Ethereal origin its birth
Again is wafted to the starry pole
For naught that once existed e'er can die."*

—EURIPIDES.



LOST LETTERS FROM LESBOS

BY
LUCY McDOWELL MILBURN



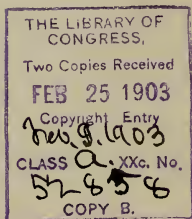
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TO

MRS. MILWARD ADAMS

MAY THESE FEW THOUGHTS GLEANED FROM
THE PAGES OF THE PAST AND THE VISIONS
OF THE FUTURE BE TO YOU A HAPPY
REMINDER OF THE HOURS WE
HAVE SPENT WITH SAPPHO
AND HER PUPILS

L. McD. M.

Preface

THE following pages belong not to the is, nor the was, but purely to the might have been.

All maidens dream of love. Nearly all maidens have lovers. Should a maiden and her lover be separated, even for a brief space, they write each to the other. Poets and Princes are no exception to this rule: nor do the ages bygone reveal anything in the way of lovmaking very different from that now in vogue. "Love is love and hearts are hearts the wide world over" sang Browning, in referring to Euripides' ability to charm the world to-day as in days of old.

Feeling sure that this is true, the author

Preface

of Lost Letters hopes that they will reflect enough of love's true color to make life brighter for some lovers, old and young.

LUCY MCDOWELL MILBURN.

Chicago, Ill., 1902.

Introduction

DURING our stay in Cairo in the winter of 1900, we made an excursion to Naukratis,¹ which was most interesting and instructive. I for one almost overcame my prejudice to Pharaoh Hopras,² when I saw how thoroughly he had appreciated Greek culture, and I shared to a degree the enthusiasm of the German Egyptologists who are finding so much that is precious in this Greco-Egyptian town. I felt like taking a grubbing-axe and spade in my own hands, so eager was I to unearth something in the way of a Greek relic from Egyptian soil.

Early in the spring we joined some Orientalists for a short tour through Phoenicia, and expected to go as far as Damascus. But the night we should have spent in that city we passed in our tents near a place of no name, through

what seemed to me unpardonable stupidity regarding distances, on the part of our conductor. I fretted so at the loss of time that I did not sleep, and dressing very early, I stepped out of the tent to see the morning waken on the plains that had been trodden by many men of yore whose names I love. I dared not even go as far as the spring, near which the guards were sleeping, for near at hand were three strange men coming towards our camp, who seemed to be in a dispute regarding something which they carried. I shouted to arouse the guide, and Professor Hart, never a sound sleeper, put his head out of the next tent on hearing that some Arabs were at hand. He soon joined us and before many minutes the whole party were at the spring curious to see what brought these wandering merchants our way. Something to sell, we doubted not. One of them carried a metal case of most curious workmanship. What was it?

Where from? How old? What did it contain, for it was now empty. Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek, Chinese, or Indian? The learned men of our party seemed now no wiser than I—they disagreed. The Arabs would not or could not tell. Bought, dug, or stolen, all alike to them, they wished to sell it, not to talk about it. It was perhaps very valuable, but it was heavy and our hands were full. I knew it was foolish to desire this old case, but I felt irresistibly drawn towards it. In fancy I was carried back to the days when Europa gathered flowers in Phœnician fields and placed them in that casket of marvellous beauty which had once belonged to Libya.³ I had always desired that; was it more foolish to wish for this? It was decided by wiser heads than mine that the men asked too much for it, considering that it was empty. Our scholars thought its value slight when we could not ascertain where it was found, and breakfast was now of

more interest than the merchants to all but me; I was not satisfied. I could not understand one word they said, but I made signs and showed some gold pieces, and begged the interpreter to question them further. He obtained the information that the case had contained absolutely nothing but some dirty paper. At this I was excited. Dirty paper! What might not be found on paper old enough and dirty enough. I showed three gold pieces. The Arabs drew nearer. They began to agree, and soon I was given to understand that the dirty paper would be exchanged for the gold pieces, provided I swore never to tell where I got it, not even to let the men of our party know I had it. These crafty tradesmen dreaded the archæologist. They were superstitious, and also they knew that to eyes wiser than theirs the writings on the paper might betray the home of the casket, and convict them of stealing. Being duly sworn, and giv-

ing the gold into their hands, I received a roll which the spokesman had carried beneath his cloak. For some days I had no opportunity to inspect my purchase. Although I enjoyed my own curiosity and the mystery, I had many misgivings as to whether I had been wise to dispose of my gold so easily. There was the possibility that I had nothing more valuable than a bundle of nineteenth-century newspapers thrown away by European travellers. Not until we reached Athens had I time to examine my parcel. There I had the valuable assistance of a professor of philology in the university, and also of Mr. L., a most learned Greek scholar from America. The dirty newspaper removed, revealed several small rolls of antique Egyptian papyrus. The quality and stamp showed that no mean or ordinary person could have owned it. The writing on it was of the best Æolian Greek. The age we could not at first determine, but as fragment after frag-

ment was deciphered, we became convinced that no hand but Sappho's could have penned these lines. Before beginning the translation of the letters, I went for a two weeks' trip to Lesbos. Had I stayed there long enough I might have been writing poetry now instead of stumbling over prose. Ionic soil produces no Homers now, nor Æolian air any Sapphos, though the breezes that blow over lovely Lesbos are freighted with song as in Sappho's day, and the meadows are as verdant, the vines and blossoms are as beautiful as when Virgil hymned his lay.

Oh days in Lesbos! June days, midst fragrance and refreshment of the Now, blended with fancies and recollections of the Then. Oh blessed isle where loving Sappho breathed and sung. My days there were as a dream that passed all too quickly into the night. I had trod the streets of Mytilene, wandered in the myrtle groves, and sat upon the

Introduction

Lesbian rocks and sand. Perhaps in the very place where Sappho used to watch for her brother's boat.

I returned to Athens with a new love for my treasure. I felt the task of translating easier, and though my work is far from being that of a scholar, and any English version must fall short of the beauty of the original text, I desire to share the fruit of my labors with all those who love Sappho for her best self.

Letter I

HAD my father lived, my life would have been different. His heart was as noble as his birth, and his intellect as large as his heart. My mother is of the most yielding nature, and was entirely ruled by my stepfather. He, a merchant, chose a husband for me as he would have selected a piece of pottery. I was too young to object, and had not the slightest conception of what I was plunging into. For five years my life was scarcely bearable, shut up in that little inland town, hearing only the chatter of silly women, or my husband's friends talking about the buying and selling price of fabrics and metals, while my soul longed for music and eloquence. My breathing spaces were my visits to Erinna;⁴ Rhodes was not Lesbos, but it was a Greek island, and I could behold the dear old sea. When Cleis,⁵ I called her for my mother, was two years old, I found myself a widow, with means to go where I would. My stepfather

having passed to the Shades, I returned to my mother's house, and here among the vines and the nightingales, I sing and write and love. Two are dependent on me, one on account of her tender age, the other because of declining years. So though my heart is overflowing with desire to see you once more, to be with you, now that it is not wrong to wish it, I beg of you not to ask me to do that which would be selfish and I should regret. You may come to me, I cannot yet go to you.

Letter II

I WISH I might know your father. I am sure he is a grand man. I owe him a great deal of gratitude for having his children taught Greek.⁶ Your mother I love without knowing aught else of her save that she gave birth to such a son. I believe if a true woman loves a man she must love and honor his mother. I do not wonder that your royal parents disapprove of me. Why should they not? I am in their eyes a barbarian,⁷ and worse than that, I have stolen something that was once wholly theirs. Do not blame them. Love me still, but speak not to them of your love.

Letter III

No, I shall not try to learn your language since you know mine. I do not believe your words would be as sweet in another tongue. If ever I should have courage to learn another set of sounds it must be because they have more music in them than the Greek words, and that may be when men have grown much wiser and better than they are now. But do tell me more about the new language you are learning, and what you will find in it to repay you. I know so little about those ancient people of the East. Their writers of the present day, if one can judge by hearsay, are very tiresome; Alcæus⁸ met one called Jeremiah,⁹ whom he imitates in fun, likening his words to the sighing of the breeze after a storm. He, I believe, is always anticipating some ill, as if there were not sorrows enough without wailing beforehand what may come to pass. . . .

Letter IV

. . . . I DO not expect to touch the sky
with my arms,¹⁰ even though I walked to
the end of the earth. But I do expect to
reach above the sky with my songs. I feel
that they are heard beyond the clouds; for
leaving the golden throne of Zeus, the
Graces and the beautiful-haired Muses¹¹
come hither and gather in their arms all that
is best in our thoughts and in our hearts,
and carry the offering to their home above.

The sweet blush rose and flowers of tender grace
I will this eve upon my bosom place,
And when their fragrance wafts up to my face
I'll think of Cleis.

The little word of letters four you sent,
I'll wear within my heart and feel content,
As surely as it was sincerely meant
It will not wither.

Letter V

THOUGH Mother Earth is a very large part of us, I hold that as she had a spouse,¹² he, too, must be our parent, and if we wish to know more of this heavenly one, we must live worthy of such an heritage. I would not belittle Mother Earth. I love her and all her robes, but I long to know more of that place whence the light proceeds. . . .

Here is a little song I wrote when a child that our slaves sing every morning.

Hail wondrous light,
Goddess ever bright!
'Tis she! 'tis she!
Breaks the bonds of night.

See on the lawn
Rosy-fingered dawn.
Oh, glee! oh, glee!
Darkness all has gone.

Let praises ring,
Beauty ever sing,
For me, for me,
Daylight joy doth bring.

Letter VI

I DO not hesitate one moment to answer which of all the gods I deem most blessed—Zeus's dearest daughter, Aphrodite, the weaver of many spells. She is the most blessed of all who dwell on Olympus, and most worthy to be worshipped. If we worship not Love, we are without the better part of life. I know I am much censured for teaching the Lesbian maidens to write so many hymns to the Goddess of Love. I should, I am told, have them sing only to Apollo and Artemis! Who lives that does not worship the sun and moon and all that light brings to us? We who emulate the Muses must all ask aid of Apollo. He is our chief teacher.¹³ Then all young maidens naturally worship his sister, fair Artemis; but Aphrodite they fear. They have erroneous ideas of her, and talk of her in secret, when they should praise her and love her and seek her aid openly. I think we err when we represent Love as

blind; most mortals are blind to the true idea of love, but Love himself is Argus-eyed,¹⁴ and shines with the brightness and beauty of the sun. It seems to me that Hesiod is quite right in counting Love the first of deities, but even he does not make Love old enough. He says, "First Chaos, then Love."¹⁵ Ah, only seeming chaos! Divine Love must have been or naught else could be. What brought order out of chaos? A child of Chaos. Nay, that which held sway before Chaos—Love, which has no beginning, no end.

Letter VII

I ENVY the Priestesses of Dodona,¹⁶ who, as you may know, are from Egypt, their marvellous power of interpreting the voice of the breeze as it comes through the leaves. Is it a wisdom possessed by many of your countrywomen, or only by a sacred few? I love to lie all day on the ground beneath the apple-trees and listen to the breeze as it plays on the leaves. I verily believe each leaf has a note of its own, whatever the breeze may be, though the music differs much when the north or west wind blows from the mild rustling of the south wind. The strains are also very different in cloudy or sunny weather. You may say the tune is affected by my own feelings. Yes, no doubt that is a part of the difference, but the leaves also feel; they murmur, they sigh, they moan, and they cry—they laugh and they titter, they giggle and they whisper, but they do it all to a song of their own, which I vainly try to imitate on my lyre.

Letter VIII

THE myrtle is now in full blossom, and it is said that the Queen of Love frequents the groves when the myrtle blooms, so I sit by the hour under the pink fringe and pray to her to grant me favor. So many hymns have I sung to her that should I write them down it would take one of your great palaces to hold them. I shall not write them, but send them floating off to the great white clouds behind which the goddess has her throne.¹⁸ I wish that you might hide behind the cypress some morning and hear a song I have just finished. The girls sing it in three parts. I send a copy of the words.

Myrtle blooms are hanging low,
Sing heigho, heigho!
Hours and Graces, Muses all,
From the vaulted blue we call,
Send your aid, we pray,
For the Queen of Love to-day
We a wreath would twine,
Which, when she doth seek her shrine
'Midst the fringes pink,

Lost Letters from Lesbos

Every blossom that we link
Shall to her a message bear
And adorn her hair.

Zephyrs that o'er Cyprus blow,
Sing heigho, heigho!
Bring with you the foam-born maid,
As of old we need her aid,
Lest our suit shall fail;
Stoutest hearts do often quail
Ere they feel that love
Known by brightest ones above,
Where it has its home
Yet on earth awhile dost roam,
Let me all its blessings prove
In our myrtle grove.

Letter IX

I WOULD not have the profoundest depths of my being stirred. It is the feeling there are unfathomed deeps to my heart and incomprehensible circles to my soul that makes me sure that I shall live hereafter. Eternity alone can answer the questions that arise within my being. When I am restless, and my spirit roves in quest of something at illimitable heights, I realize that I might if I would quit this nook of Jove's domain, but fear to trust my untutored wings, so I come back again and again to earth that I may gain strength to rise. The falls from visionary heights are dizzy times; my brain reels with the fullness of an enlarged vision.

My spirit, momentarily freed, sees that the flesh is a stubborn glebe, furrowed only in part, and needing gentle dews which the rapt spirit draws from heaven. The higher the flight the harder the fall, and for a time the bruised flesh complains, but that

Lost Letters from Lesbos

only tends to make me soar once more and
again be resigned to pain. . . .

. . . . Oh those tiresome Hours¹⁹ who
each morning open the gates of heaven! I
wish sometimes that the gates would stay
closed all day that I might not know how
long the time is my brother tarries. Was
ever brother dearer than Charaxus.²⁰

Shall I forget thee?
Can it be done?
These questions come to me—must come.

Will heartbeat cease?
Some time it must.
Will breath decrease,
And all else turn to dust?

Then I'll forget thee.
Nay, not then,
For memory will be more clear,
Yes, it will grow year by year,
And we shall be so near, so near,
When life on earth is over.

Letter X

THE Days have leaden feet, the Night lets her horses creep, and oh, it is such a weary, weary time while I wait for Charaxus's return. The trade in wine does not keep him so long away, I know, so I begin to fear the report is true which says that he has found bright eyes and rosy cheeks in a maiden at Naukratis. I wrote some verses in a ridiculous strain about this fair Egyptian maid, Doricha,²¹ beginning thus:

You tell me she has rosy cheeks
And teeth like unto pearl.
Some mountains that have rosy peaks
And whitest caps unfurl
May yet contain a mass that reeks
Which down their sides they hurl.

My making merry over his choice does not cut short his stay on the other shore.

PART SECOND

Letter XI

SINCE thou wast here and thy dear feet did press the grass, the very dew sparkles brighter than was its wont in times ago. This bank of moss whereon I now am sitting is far velvetier than at this time last year, as if it did rejoice that once thou didst lie upon it. The Sea is dark and angry to-day. It brings me no message from thee; so I go not to the beach, but feast my recollection on the day when thou didst venture in thy frail bark to these vine-clad shores. O how dear each shrub, each vine, has become which thou didst admire. Thou saidst a poet should praise the beauty of this isle, that its loveliness should be a continual feast to the poet's soul. Ah that might be if I had eyes for these days, but I have none. My eyes are strained to see across the sea, my ears are deafened to the song of birds, I but listen to the waves and wonder if the tune they beat on yonder rocks they learned on Libya's shores.

Letter XII

LAST night fair Cynthia²² came out of the sea clad in a pale saffron robe, and as she arose in the sky she dropped a veil of gold across the water so long that it reached to me. And while my eyes with wonder did behold this beauty my heart was filled with joy, for right across the veil of gold did I behold a sail, and soon my brother signaled, and I ran right into the sea, so glad was I to hasten to his bark. He picked me up all drenched with brine and held me to his heart. And when I clasped his hand I had no need to speak, I knew that he had been with thee.

Letter XIII

OH Phaon, Phaon,²³ only a woman's heart can flutter as does mine when I see the top-sail of the boat returning from Libya's shores. It is my brother's craft I say come safely from a voyage of peril, and I run to the shore to bid him welcome. But my heart is not fluttering in time to the sail, nor am I bounding like a young deer to meet Charaxus, save that I know I shall have a leaflet impressed by thy dear hand, some words of cheer engraved for me to be forever graven on my heart. I press the tender slips of papyrus to my breast as if they could quiet my heart, then I lift the seal.

But before my eyes can read a word a mist comes over them, my burning haste has melted the dew of my soul; as the sun draws the vapor from the sea, so the sight of thy missive lifts the moisture to my eyes; a few drops wet my cheeks, and thy Sappho's eyes are made more clear. Joy

Lost Letters from Lesbos

comes in warm floods over her brow, as she reads that she is still beloved and—then the earth is naught—there is no sea between us—for the space of a breath I live.

Letter XIV

I REPAIRED to the myrtle grove this morning to be alone with your written words. When I opened the packet my heart was sore at seeing so many empty sheets, but as I read that you desired to hear from me at more length, I saw why you sent so goodly a roll of papyri. You do not wish my messages written on perishable material, you wish them to last as long as you do, you say. It is a delight to use such beautiful papyrus, and I shall try to send you some verses that shall be worthy of the material on which they are penned. Here is one I sang last night.

The rose that blooms never dies,
Beauty is a law of good,
All it weaves forever lives;
Why, then, does the rose decay?
That it may come some other day
And weave new garbs of beauty.

Letter XV

THE leaves are all of a tremble this morning, as if rejoiced to be bathed in light. Everything on earth seems quivering with delight from the flood of sunshine which pours down from the sky, and which is more than welcome after much gloom, for Apollo has been driving great herds of cattle for several days, so that his glorious car has been lost to sight; now not even a flock of sheep steals across the sun's bright face,²⁴ no, nor does a single Muse trail her garments over the blue vault. The sky is all clear, all blue, everywhere light abounds. Apollo is king, and my heart goes out to him in royal adoration, so that without an effort I have written two hymns of praise. One as the good shepherd and one as the king of glory, and the thought comes to me that he shines just as wondrously on those who do not adore him as on those that do, and he shines not only on you and me who can worship him, but he shines on the birds

Lost Letters from Lesbos

and the flowers and the leaves. The birds, of course, do unconsciously worship, for they pour out divine melodies when the sun shines on them; and the flowers brighten and shed their perfumes; even the tender leaves grow green, and that is the best that they can do; but the human heart that does not respond to the sunbeam is duller than the leaves.

Letter XVI

My mother no longer opposes my teaching; she cannot herself see the reason for women learning aught else but housework and needlework, but since I am determined to write and play and sing, she takes pride that so many maidens come to learn the art of poetry from me. Finding that some objected to playing because it injured the beauty of their finger tips, I have contrived for them a piece of ivory, so that it is a very good substitute for the fingers in striking the strings of the lyre or cithara.²⁵ I have my school in our own beautiful garden now. This is a great joy to me, for I feel that I am helping my friends to a larger life. My brothers still object to my work; they are sensitive to what the city thinks, for it is said that I am unfitting the girls for wives, that I with my music have stolen all the maidens' hearts, and some say cruel things, that I desire my pupils to love me more than they love the goddesses. I wish them

Lost Letters from Lesbos

to love me, that through me they may learn to love the things that I love. If the men of our day misunderstand us, I have no fear but that in days to come the men who live hereafter shall praise us.

Letter XVII

ERINNA, of whom you have often heard me speak, has greater talent than any maiden I know. But she persists in writing grand poems to rival Homer. I tell her that one Homer is enough for all ages, and if she desires to live in the hearts and memory of all, she must not copy any one, but just be her best self. I fear her desire to shine now will keep her from her highest development. We should not seek the applause of men, only that of the Muses, if we would lead men.

Letter XVIII

THE most beautiful to look on of all maidens who frequent my school is Lesbia. A day not long ago Alcæus came to play for us on his new cithara, which has sixteen strings. He was giving us a battle-hymn, all full of Mars and gory heroes when his eyes fell on Lesbia for the first time. She had just come from behind the laurel drawn forth by Alcæus's voice. Scarcely could he finish the martial hymn, so inspired was he by Lesbia's face, and ere the last notes had died upon the air, he improvised a song to her that was of rarest beauty. After Alcæus had gone all of us tried to recall the song. While I could not quite reproduce it, I think I got the spirit of it, and some of the fire and passion. That you may judge what Lesbia's beauty is to evoke such words from martial Alcæus, I send it as I remember it.²⁶

TO LESBIA

Many a time the lance I've thrown,
And stouter hearted yet have grown
When in the thickest of the fight

Sad was my plight.

On which side to fling the shield,
Or evermore what arms to wield
To ward off such a blow that falls

When Beauty calls.

When beauty such as this I see,
'Tis wisest far to turn and flee;
For what the weapon could I send

Man to defend.

The gods themselves would be hard hit
If ere towards them her glance should flit;
Then why strive I to save my heart

From Beauty's dart?

If the beauty of a mortal maid could inspire man to notes like these, shall not the beauty of the immortals, when love and prayer have revealed them to us, inspire us to sing undying verses? Our first hymn each morning is to the Queen of Love, that as of old she did visit the Cyprian isle and show her perfect form to those who worshipped her,²⁷ she will come to Lesbos and tune our lyres to loftier strains than yet we have dreamed.

Letter XIX

WHEN I think how we and other nations have, in times not far gone by, sacrificed our young girls²⁸ upon the altar or condemned them to serve in a temple at some remote region of the earth, to assuage the wrath of a goddess or to appease an unjust god, I yearn to teach all young maidens to rely on themselves, so as not to be the tools of men and the victims of false prophets. I would rather have my little daughter know her own worth than to bequeath to her all the treasures of Lydia, were they mine. I deem my life will not have been in vain if I can but place one woman higher than I myself can stand. Each one who takes a step onward makes the task easier for those who come after. I would that the women of Greece in days to come may be examples to the world in virtue, wisdom, liberty, and all that constitutes the mastery of life.

Letter XX

You ask me to say which of our sages you shall study to know the Greek's best thought. Pythagoras of Samos has given us much that is good and nothing not worth remembering. I often give to my pupils one of his maxims to ponder and write upon. Many beautiful verses grow for us out of one little line of his wisdom. "Cut not fire with a sword," is a symbol that I gave to my little Cleis the other day, and asked her to tell me why we should obey it.

She is very prosaic, and her immediate answer was, "Because you cannot do it." Yes, I said, that is one reason. Long since I found that her fiery temper could not be curbed by any severe measures, but only by great tenderness. My favorite symbol is "The wind blowing adore the sound." Anactoria wrote a song a few days ago, in which she likened sound to the lines and silence to the spaces of the musical staff.

Lost Letters from Lesbos

Taking her thought in part I wrote a little poem. Here it is.

Sing the silence on my shell,²⁹
Notes were heard in lowest hell,
And on earth in every dell
Sung by brightest ones who dwell
Round Zeus's throne on high.

But silences, how profound,
Everywhere in space around;
We shall never know the sound
That through all the spheres abound
Until we reach the sky.

Then with all the heavenly choir
Music that will never tire,
Lighted with Promethean fire,
I shall sing upon my lyre
And through the spaces fly.

Sound, I believe, is great only because it makes the silence which is greater. "Wipe not a seat with a torch," is a maxim that practical girls like. Before they understand its import they laugh at it, saying, "Would any one ever think of doing such a thing, or "It would burn the seat if it did not put out the torch." After they are told its meaning it makes a serious impression.

The torch represents the spirit, the illuminating power, while the seat is the habitation of the spirit. So this maxim must mean not to use our inspiration, our soul's power, for gross or material ends; not to sink our higher nature in the care of our bodies. I did not intend to write entirely of Pythagoras. Thales is very wise, he is much older, and his learning is more of a material kind. Periander of Corinth has the credit of saying many things which emanate from Arion, a poet of Lesbos, who lives now in Periander's court. Our own Pittacus gives us precepts that are worthy of repetition. My brother Larichus is cup-bearer now to the king, Alcæus is often sent for to sing to his highness, so through them I am kept in knowledge of the wise sayings of Pittacus. He frequently asserts that "love levels all ranks," and this is very comforting to me. The Athenian Solon is by far the wisest man of this age in Greece; about this every one is agreed, else I should hesitate to praise him, fearing my partiality might be attributed to vanity, for he has said much in praise of poor me, whom he

has never seen; and only last year, hearing one of my songs at a banquet, he said he hoped to live long enough to learn them all by heart. After that you surely will not miss seeing him when he visits Egypt, as I hear he is likely to do soon.³⁰

Letter XXI

YES, it is true that we have a legend which says that the head of Orpheus, after he was torn to pieces by those fierce, wicked women of Thrace, floated over the sea and came to the shores of Lesbos, and there was found and hung in a temple and gave forth sweet strains which inspired the music of our isle. I think that we owe very much to Orpheus. His hymns to the gods have been a great source of inspiration to me and to others. I do not believe that his head actually came to these shores, but some of his pupils who left Thrace after his persecution came here to teach; that perhaps was the beginning of any real study of poetry among us. It was also the beginning of a broader study of religion, and a deeper insight into the soul of man. I believe Orpheus had direct communication with the gods, else how could he be so much wiser than his age?³¹

Letter XXII

WHY do we call the Muses daughters of Zeus? All our poets do not so name them. Hesiod says that they are daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne.³² It is a very dear thought to me that memory is worthy to be classed as one of the heavenly brides. It should make us careful not to remember anything but beautiful visions. I believe that in one sense all who strive to bring music into the world, and by the aid of memory to preserve good thoughts and give them to others, may be called the daughters of Zeus. There seems no reason why the number of the Muses should be limited.³³

Letter XXIII

YOUR objection to my following the teaching of Pythagoras because he is so young amuses me. We have a saying that those "whom the gods love die young." I was somewhat old before I learned any wisdom, but I think that the great souls come to earth if not full of wisdom, at least so ready to acquire it, that it does not take many years to become a sage. Then if we believe those Oriental doctrines concerning rebirth, which you admit are very fascinating, Pythagoras may be ages old in spirit. I am not entirely converted to the doctrine which leads us to believe that we come again and again into bodies, nor do I feel inclined to favor the preservation of the house of clay after death. For if we never return to earth, what matters it; or if we do, we come as infants and build new houses for ourselves. I do appreciate your sentiment about my body and your desire to have me believe in embalming, for although I think

when life has left it the body is best preserved in the form of ashes, yet it is hard with those we love to see the pyre lighted. In one sense I do believe in rebirth, but I think we do not have to die to experience it. I was certainly born again when I began to love, and once again when I realized that my spirit existed independently of my body; that even after my body should be burned to ashes, I should have a conscious existence. The story of Psyche was the touchstone that opened my eyes to an after life, while my love for you has made me understand that to live always is desirable. . . . How exquisite and full of suggestion is the little Horus rising from the lotus-flower. I prize it highly and feel deeply indebted to the artist who designed it, as well as to the dear one who thought me worthy to receive such a treasure. Truly all art is one—beauty.

Letter XXIV

So you think that the worship of Isis was an outgrowth of the worship of Io.³⁴ I am surprised to hear you say that any of our goddesses were the forerunners of yours. Is it not bewildering to think on all that the nations of the earth have known, and sad to realize all that has been forgotten? Though as in our own lives it is well to forget much, so probably it is all for the best that so large a part of the history of nations is buried. If the priests have no records to prove which goddess reigned first in the hearts of men, Io or Isis, then there is one point less for jealousy and contention. Sooner or later we learn that the gods in all kindness have hidden the future from us, and is it not as easy to see that they have some purpose in burying the past? If it were intended we should know the past and future, we would be made with three heads instead of one. I sometimes wish I had three hearts.

Letter XXV

. . . . LOVE is such a very tender flower
I wonder would it bear transplanting. Here
in our myrtle grove or under the olive-trees
I can sit and dream of you all day, I can
hear you as you spoke, I can see you as you
sat, I can all but clasp your hand in memory,
and where'er you are, my soul can touch
your soul, for my love flows ever towards
you. But were I to go to a strange land,
leaving my home to dwell among a strange
people, would my love last? Would your
love last? If I were different there than
here, would you not regret? The blessed
Aphrodite will guide me in this, for she
would not have our love grow less.

Letter XXVI

IT is raining to-day, and I must sit within doors, and though usually when it rains the heavens seem nearer to me, now they seem shut out by the clouds which reach the earth on all sides. I have been reading some of your old letters for a little light. I came upon some lines which comfort me, in that you seem to be enveloped in clouds, the darkness of which makes mine by contrast seem bright. You ask why this great chasm between us? I call it the valley of necessity. You living in such a flat country cannot gain the same lessons from nature that I can. The higher the mountain peaks the deeper the valley, the nearer any of the mountain peaks the darker the valley. You and I are at present climbing different peaks, the higher we go the farther we seem apart, for the deeper and darker the valley grows, but when we reach the top we shall look out at the same view. Looking toward each other,

Lost Letters from Lesbos

we shall see all that lies between. Only looking at this view from opposite directions, what is on your right will be on my left. If we were both on the same peak looking the same way, we should only know one side of life, the other side would always be dark; as we are on mountains far apart, yet desiring to be near, we shall tell each other what we see, and then each one will have both views. So I think this deep, dark valley is between us that you and I may have a larger view of life; the great Cloud Compeller will in the end unite our souls as he did those of Cupid and Psyche³⁵ if we but struggle on and persevere in what is right. Think not that I do not yearn every day to be nearer to you. I cry out often in my weakness that all is dark away from you, but while necessity lies between us, we must climb alone. My spirit soars in quest of that height where I shall forever see you.

Letter XXVII

SWEETER by far than harp, more golden than gold, are the loving thoughts I send over the sea. Some days I know not which path to pursue; I find my mind at variance; he of the night, dark-eyed Sleep, has of late deserted me, so that I listen all night to that angel of the spring, the mellow-throated nightingale, and think perhaps the life of a bird the most blessed. Tell me, Oh Philomela and Prochne,³⁶ are ye more happy so?

Letter XXVIII

FOR the first time I read your letters without pleasure, nay with positive pain. An iron hand seems to seize my heart and clutch it tightly. So for three days I have scarcely taken breath. I am so sad I know not what to say, that needs must be you go so far away. I see you quite calmly facing danger; just for once I wish you were not great and brave. I wish I might hide you when the army goes, for it freezes my blood to think of battles. Surely Egypt is large enough and powerful enough; Oh, why should she sacrifice so many lives just to gain a little land? Yet all my moaning is of no avail! You will go, duty calls, you say, and love must wait. Oh, cruel, cruel duty, that points the way to war.³⁷

The sea makes no sound to-day. Its anger has passed away, and I in silence have lain for much time in the deep grass with my face pressed to earth. When I am all sad I care not to see the sky, nor sea,

Lost Letters from Lesbos

but only to keep close to dear Mother Earth,
and she gives me strength to endure. So
many throbbing thoughts have I poured
into the lap of Rhea to-day, you should
have felt the earth tremble where you stand.

Letter XXIX

LAST night as I lay on my couch a great, deep loneliness came over me. I arose and went to the window and gazed into the silent night. A nightingale in the garden was singing such a weird, pensive song, I could not stand that single note of pain, so I hurriedly took my lyre and sought to drown the bird's note. When suddenly at the sound of my sad strain his became gladsome, as if he rejoiced to find a companion in grief. This is what I sang.

A gentle bird has lost its mate,
It lieth at the garden gate,
 'Tis fate, sad fate
That everything is born to die.
Had it done aught to suffer so?
It calleth in a voice so low,
 Ah woe, ah woe,
Why on the ground does my love lie?
Oh Aphrodite, goddess bright,
Bring help to me this very night
 So sad my plight
That with the bird my heart doth cry
 Ah woe, ah woe.

Letter XXX

CHARAXUS will bring back his bride this trip, and we are full of preparations for their home-coming.

I have just finished a song for the bridesmaids, which, with Terpsichore's aid, they will sing during the wedding festivities.

From the land of the sun
To the isles of the sea
We come, we come
To dance on the lea.
To the fairest of brides
Rare offering we bear;
We come, we come
Your bounties to share.

It is love that we bring,
And love we would take;
Here, as at home,
Love garlands we make.
Would you join in the dance
Of our mystical band?
Then share in our love,
Though not of our land.

Lost Letters from Lesbos

With us would you live,
Or come to our land?
It is love that we give,
And love we demand.
We'd oft come to you
With roses in hand,
If only you knew
The charms of our land.

We come to a few,
And over them shed
Such heavenly dew
By love they are led.
It is love that we bring,
And love that we take;
Here as at home,
Love garlands we make.

I try to sympathize with Charaxus, but my heart is so heavy, oh, so heavy, when I think that many months will pass without a word from you, nor can I send you any message, save by praying to the gods to care for you.

Letter XXXI

My brother sails at break of day, and although I have written and written, and the light burns low, I cannot bear to say the last word. . . . I am sending you a casket with a secret clasp. It was given to me by my father, who bought it of a Phœnician merchant. The carvings on it are of a very old legend. Take it to Syria with you, and when you look at the figures of the two lovers, remember that we, like them, shall walk together in Elysian fields, even if we never walk together here. Death loses its terror when we know that love is eternal. The tree on which these lovers are gazing represents the life of love, its roots are in the earth, but its branches are in the sky. Through love we touch the infinite, we realize it is ours, and from that moment we are never separated. Farewell for a space. May the gods be on your side. . . .

*Ode to the Tenth Muse*³⁸

STRING my lute to float on high
Words that are not made to die;
Let the Muses, one and all,
Dwelling in Apollo's hall,
Gather in their arms our thought,
All that's best, let it be wrought;
Made by them a chaplet green
Lovelier far than e'er was seen;
Whose the head on which to fall,
Is there one in this bright hall
Worthy to be crowned by them?
Then let that one be my theme.

Father Zeus be praised for aye,
Hera, too, shall have her day;
For all who on Olympus dwell,
Often have I tuned my shell.
If e'er from truth my lute depart,
May I be struck by Phœbus' dart.
Deeds of kings that, on the earth,
Fill the sons of men with mirth;
These my harp has ofttimes praised,
But martial strains it ne'er has raised,
Let this lay no exception be,
Now we'll sing the praise of three.

Lost Letters from Lesbos

First to Lesbos's king we bring
Our homage; Then we sing
Of him who o'er the sea has come
To bring our fairest daughter home.
Neco, Prince of Egypt, hail!
And if in aught our songs shall fail,
Remember we on you bestow
All man should wish for here below.
Wisdom nor wealth did Paris choose,
But love, yet he his bride did lose;
We give you one who for her dower,
Has wealth and wisdom, love and power.

Immortal Sappho, maid divine,
Thou sharest with the heavenly nine
All honor. Shout through all the town
That on her head we place a crown.
Hasten with the chaplet green,
Greet her one and all as queen;
The Lesbian, a tenth muse we name,
And prophesy that her bright fame
Shall spread o'er all the world.
This title till the stars do fall,
Nations yet unborn shall Call
And glorify her name.

NOTES

Notes

Note 1. Naukratis.

"But on the whole I am inclined to think that the establishment of the Greek factories and merchants at Naukratis may be considered as dating in the reign of Psammetichus."

Grote's *His. Greece*, Part II, ch. 20.

Herodotus, Book II, ch. 97, 179.

Plato, *Phædrus*, 274.

Note 2. Pharaoh Hopras. Grandson of Necos, called by Herodotus, Apries.

Herodotus, Book II, ch. 161.

"I will give Pharaoh Hopras, King of Egypt, into the hands of his enemies and of them that seek his life."

Jer. XLIV, 30.

Note 3. Europa's casket.

Moschus, *Idyl* II.

"Golden the casket that Europa bore,
Dazzling the eyes, a wonder of the world;
Worked by Hephæstus, and to Libya given
What time she wed the earth-shaking god of sea."

A full description follows.

Note 4. Erinna.

"Few were thy words, Erinna, short thy lay,
But thy short lay the Muse herself had given.

Thus never shall thy memory decay,
Nor night obscure thy fame, which lives in
heaven."

Antipater in Greek Anthology.

Note 5. Cleis. Name of Sappho's daughter
and her mother's name also.

"I have a child, a lovely one,
In beauty like the golden sun,
Or like sweet flowers of earliest bloom,
And Cleis is her name, for whom
I, Lydia's treasure, were they mine
Would glad resign."

Paraphrase of fragment by Merivale.

Note 6. Psammetichus.

Grote's *His. Greece*, Part II, ch. 20.
Herodotus, Book II, ch. 154.

Note 7. "The Egyptians call by the name of
barbarian all such as speak a language different
from their own."

Herodotus, Book II, ch. 158.

Note 8. Alcæus. A martial poet of Lesbos.

Horace *Odes*, Book I, ch. 32.

"And Sappho, with sweet lyric moan
Bewailing her ungentle sex,
And thee, Alcæus, louder far
Chanting the tale of woeful wrecks,
Of woeful exile, woeful war."

Horace, Book II, ch. 13.

Notes

Note 9. Jeremiah.

"During her lifetime Jeremiah first began to prophesy." (628 B. C.)

Life of Sappho, Wharton, p. 1.

Note 10. "I do not expect to touch the sky."

Fragment 29.

Note 11. "Beautiful-haired Muses."

Part of Fragment 66.

These two fragments are from a charming little volume, "Songs of Sappho," by James S. Easby-Smith.

Note 12. A Spouse.

"Then with heaven consorting."

Elton's Hesiod. Theog., 181.

Plato, Symposium, 180 D. E.

Note 13. Apollo. "Lord of the lyre."

Rep. of Plato, 299 E.

"Shall we begin then with the acknowledgment that education is first given through Apollo and the Muses?"

Laws of Plato, II, 654-672.

"Yea, from the Muses and the god who sends

His darts from afar, Apollo, rise on earth

Minstrels and Men of Song."

Hesiod, Theog., 130.

Note 14. "That herdsman with the myriad eyes."

Æschylus, Prom. Bound.

Notes

"Stretched Argus of the ever-wakeful eyes."

Moschus's Europa.

Note 15. "First Chaos was; next ample-bosomed earth; . . . Love then arose most beautiful amongst the deathless deities."

Hesiod, Theog.

Note 16. Dodona.

"This is the most ancient oracle in Greece."

Herodotus, Book II, ch. 52-57.

"There was a tradition in the temple of Dodona that oaks first gave prophetic utterances."

Plato, Phædrus, 275 and 244.

Plato, Laws V, 738.

"When thou hadst gone

To those Molossian plains which sweep around
Dodona shouldering heaven, whereby the fame
Of Zeus Thesprotian keepeth oracle,
And, wonder past belief, where oaks do wave
Articulate adjuration."

Æschylus, Prom. Bound.

"Than bard so honored beech or lime,
Or that Thessalian growth
In which the swarthy ringdove sat
And mystic sentence spoke."

Tennyson, "The Talking Oak."

Note 17. My lyre.

"And Sappho's love is breathing still;
She told her secret to the lute,
And yet its chords with passion thrill."

Horace, Book IV, 9.

Note 18. Sappho's Hymn to Venus.

Venus, bright goddess of the skies,
To whom unnumber'd temples rise,
Jove's daughter fair, whose wily arts
Delude fond lovers of their hearts;
O! listen gracious to my prayer,
And free my mind from anxious care.

If e'er you heard my ardent vow,
Propitious goddess, hear me now!
And oft my ardent vow you've heard,
By Cupid's friendly aid preferred,
Oft left the golden courts of Jove
To listen to my tales of love.

The radiant car your sparrows drew;
You gave the word, and swift they flew;
Through liquid air they wing'd their way,
I saw their quivering pinions play;
To my plain roof they bore their queen,
Of aspect mild and look serene.

Soon as you came, by your command
Back flew the wanton feather'd band,
Then, with a sweet enchanting look,
Divinely smiling, thus you spoke:
"Why didst thou call me to thy cell?
Tell me, my gentle Sappho, tell.

"What healing medicine shall I find
To cure thy love-distemper'd mind?
Say, shall I lend thee all my charms
To win young Phaon to thy arms?

Or does some other swain subdue
Thy heart? my Sappho, tell me, who?

“Though now, averse, thy charms he slight,
He soon shall view thee with delight;
Though now he scorns thy gifts to take,
He soon to thee shall offerings make;
Though now thy beauties fail to move,
He soon shall melt with equal love.”

Once more, O Venus, hear my prayer,
And ease my mind of anxious care;
Again vouchsafe to be my guest,
And calm this tempest in my breast!
To thee, bright queen, my vows aspire;
O grant me all my heart's desire!
Translated by F. Fawkes, M.A., about 1740.

Note 19. Hours.

“Self-moving groaned upon their hinges the
gates of heaven whereof the Hours are wardens.”
Iliad, V, 749.

Note 20. Charaxus.

Herodotus, Book II, ch. 135.
Wharton's Memoir of Sappho, p. 3.
Strabo, XVII, p. 1146.

Note 21. Rhodopis, the rosy-cheeked; a
name for Doricha, whom Charaxus married.

Herodotus, Book II, ch. 136.

Note 22. Cynthia, one of Diana's names as
the twin sister of Apollo, who was called Cynthius.

"Of Dian's praises tender maidens tell;
Of Cynthius's, unshorn god, young striplings
sing."

Horace, Book I, 21.

"Cynthia's shining orb was made
Heaven to clear, when day did close."

Ben Jonson.

Note 23. Phaon.

The epistle long attributed to Ovid, now deemed spurious, is the earliest mention we find of the story of Sappho and Phaon.

Fancy permits me to use the name as an incognito for Pharaoh-Neco, the supposed Egyptian lover of Sappho.

Note 24. Apollo's sheep and cattle.

"The flocks of the imperial Sun."

The so-called Homeric Hymn to Apollo.

Trans. W. W. Call.

"Astronomy of the Ancients."

G. C. Lewis, p. 21.

"Mythology of the Aryan Nations."

Cox, pp. 274, 467, 444, 538.

Note 25. Sappho is usually credited with the invention of the plectrum.

"It has generally been supposed that the strings of these instruments were always touched by a little staff called plectrum."

Article on Lyra. Smith's Dic., Ant.

Note 26. Hymn to Lesbia.

"Him rival of the gods I place
Him loftier get, if loftier be,
Who Lesbia sits before thy face
Who listens and who looks on thee.

Thee smiling soft. Yet this delight
Doth all my sense consign to death
For when thou dawnest on my sight
A wretched, flits my laboring breath.

My tongue is palsied. Subtly hid
Fire creeps me through from limb to limb,
My loud ears tingle all unbid,
Twin clouds of night mine eyes bedim."

Trans. by Gladstone.

"Sappho's hymn to Lesbia is preserved entire." Wharton's Memoir, pp. 58-63.

"There is no authority for attributing any part of it to Alcæus."

See Alma Tadema's School of Lesbos.

Note 27.

"Then reached she Cyprus, girt with flowing seas,
And forth emerged a goddess, beautiful in
modesty." Hesiod, Theog., p. 258.

Note 28. (Young girls sacrificed.)

Euripides—Iphigenia in Aulis.

Euripides—Iphigenia in Taurus.

Euripides—Hecuba (Polyxenia).

Euripides—Heracleidæ (Macaria).

Dante's Paradise, Canto V, 63-73.

Notes

Note 29. On my shell. . The invention of the lyre is credited to Hermes. It is said that he formed it of a tortoise shell.

“ ‘Rapt I strike the vocal shell,
Hark! the trembling chords rebel.”
Anacreon.

Note 30. “About thirty years later Solon visits Egypt in the reign of Amasis.”

Herodotus, Book I, 134.

“Solon who was the wisest of the seven sages.”

Plato, *Timæus*, 21-22.

Note 31. “Mystical initiations and hymns of Orpheus,” by Thomas Taylor, preface, pages 8-11.

Lucian, *In Oratione ad Indoctum*.

Plato, *Republic*, Book II, 364, 365.

Plato, *Laws*, VII, 677 D.

Plato, *Ion*, 536 B.

Note 32. Mnemosyne.

Hesiod, *Theog.*, 75.

“Memory that sweet Muse mother.”

Æschylus, *Prom. Bound.*

“Muses the daughters of Memory.”

Plato, *Theætetus*, 191 D.

Note 33.

“Some thoughtlessly proclaim the Muses nine

A tenth is Lesbian Sappho, maid divine.”

Greek Anthology.

Note 34. Isis or Io. Priest records.

Herodotus, Book II, ch. 41.

Also note Rawlinson.

Æschylus, Prom. Bound.

Ovid, Met., I, 588, 747.

Note 35. Cupid and Psyche.

Apuleus, Met., Lib., IV., V., and VI.

“Drink, O my daughter, and acquaint thy soul

With deathless uses, and be glad the while.

No more shall Cupid leave thy lovely side;

Thy marriage joy begins for never-ending.”

Met., Lib., VI., Trans. by E. B. B.

Note 36. Philomela and Procne.

Daughters of King Pandion of Attica, one was metamorphosed into a nightingale, the other, a swallow.”

Cox, Mythology of the Aryan Nations.

Book V, 468, 469.

Note 37. Necos, son of Psammetichus, defeated Josiah in 609 B. C., was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish, 610 B. C.

Herodotus, Book II, ch. 159, 322.

2 Kings, XXIII, 29.

2 Kings, XXIV, 7.

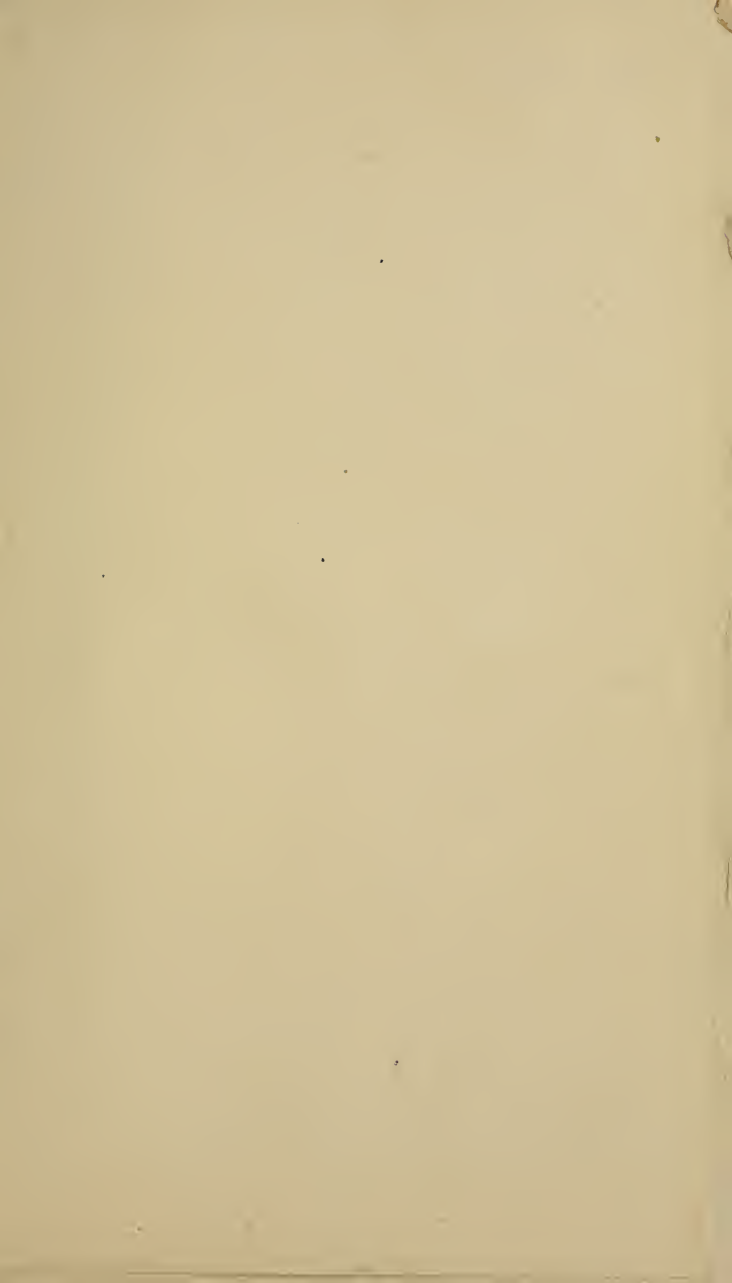
Chronicles XXXV, 22.

Jeremiah, XLVI, 2.

Note 38. Supposedly sung at the betrothal of Sappho and Pharaoh-Neco.

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